



News Release

For Immediate Release:
Wednesday, March 21, 2007

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Brain Injuries Are Preventable

UDOH Report Shows 5 New Injuries Every Day in Utah

(Salt Lake City, UT) – This month an estimated 174 Utahns will suffer life-altering injuries to the brain. If you're a male or you live off the Wasatch Front, your risk is even higher than that of other Utahns.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) today released a report that reviewed traumatic brain injuries, otherwise known as TBI, in Utahns from 2000-2003. It looks at the overall impact these injuries continue to have on the individuals, their families and communities.

“The leading cause of TBI is motor vehicle-related incidents for those under 65 years of age, with the second most common cause being fall-related injuries in those over age 65,” said Trisha Keller, Manager, UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “Sadly, these injuries are largely preventable,” she said. “Still an average of five new incidents that either require hospitalization or result in death occur each day.” Typical examples of head injuries, taken from 2005 data, include the following:

- A 45-year-old male living in a rural county suffered severe head and neck injuries when he crashed his motorcycle into a car. He was not wearing a helmet. After hospitalization, he was transferred to a rehab facility for an extended stay.
- A 19-year-old male was sustained a severe skull fracture in a single car rollover that left him hospitalized for more than a month. Tests showed marijuana in the teen's bloodstream. Today he remains dependent on others for daily care.

According to the data, these two incidents likely resulted in an average charge for inpatient hospitalization of more than \$19,000 per case. These costs do not include the costs of rehabilitation or the ongoing expenses associated with daily support services.

During the report period, nearly twice as many males as females experienced a TBI. Among those cases sampled, unintentional injuries, such as motor vehicles and falls, were the most

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common cause of TBI for 71% of males and 82% of females. In rural Utah, the overall TBI rate is 53% higher than in urban Utah.

“The findings in this report are intended to increase awareness and lead to actions that will reduce the terrible physical, emotional, and financial costs of TBI to individuals, families and communities in Utah,” says Keller.

To prevent traumatic brain injuries, the Violence and Injury Prevention Program recommends the following:

Motor Vehicles

- Wear a seat belt on every ride
- Put children in the right car seat or booster seat for their age and weight until they are at least 4'9" tall and weigh at least 80 lbs. Always secure children in the back seat
- Don't drive drunk, drugged or drowsy
- Wear a helmet on every motorcycle, ATV and snowmobile ride

Sports

- Wear the right helmet for all sports that pose a risk of head injury, including hockey, football, baseball, skiing, snowboarding, sledding, horseback riding, and bicycle, scooter and skateboard riding

Around the Home

- Check for loose carpeting, electrical cords, unsecured throw rugs, loose or missing handrails, and slippery surfaces in bathrooms
- Use a sturdy stepstool to reach overhead items
- Remove clutter from stairways and common pathways
- If older adults live in the home, install grab bars in the bath/shower area and beside the toilet
- Check older adults' medications for side effects that could cause falling
- Place nightlights in bedrooms and bathrooms
- Store firearms locked and unloaded with ammunition in a separate, secure location

March is Brain Injury Awareness month. For more information on resources available in your community, visit the Brain Injury Association of Utah Web site at www.biau.org. For a full copy of the TBI in Utah 2000-2003 report, visit the Violence and Injury Prevention Program Web site at www.health.utah.gov/vipp/pdf/TBIReportFinal.pdf.

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